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ABSTRACT

This booklet is intended to help children learn to understand and accept a classmate or schoolmate who is autistic. It describes the autistic child's characteristics and life from the child's point of view, including positive aspects such as learning to read and learning to do arithmetic, and negative aspects such as not talking well and not accepting change. Written in simple language, the booklet introduces a child with autism and provides suggestions on how classmates can be her friend. (DB)

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LEARNING TOGETHER

Learning Together

by

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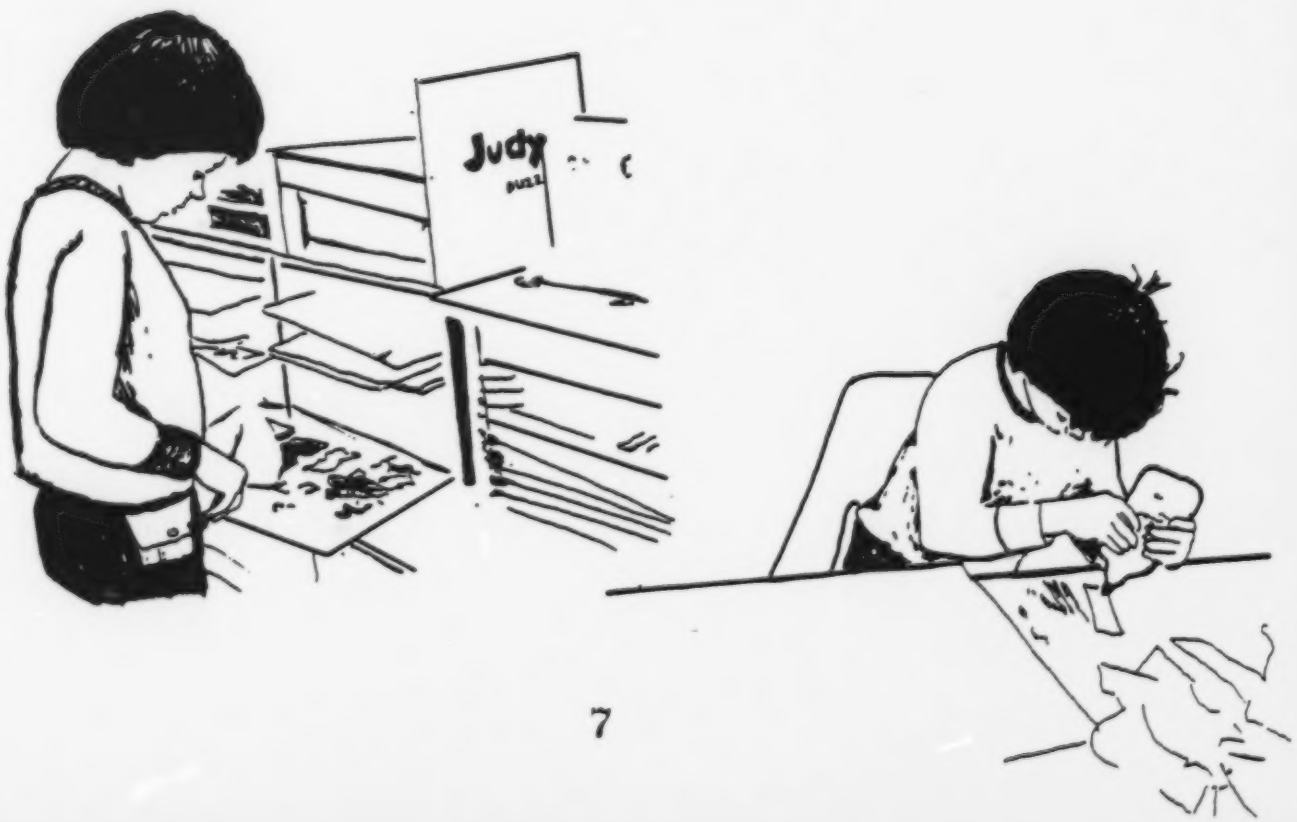
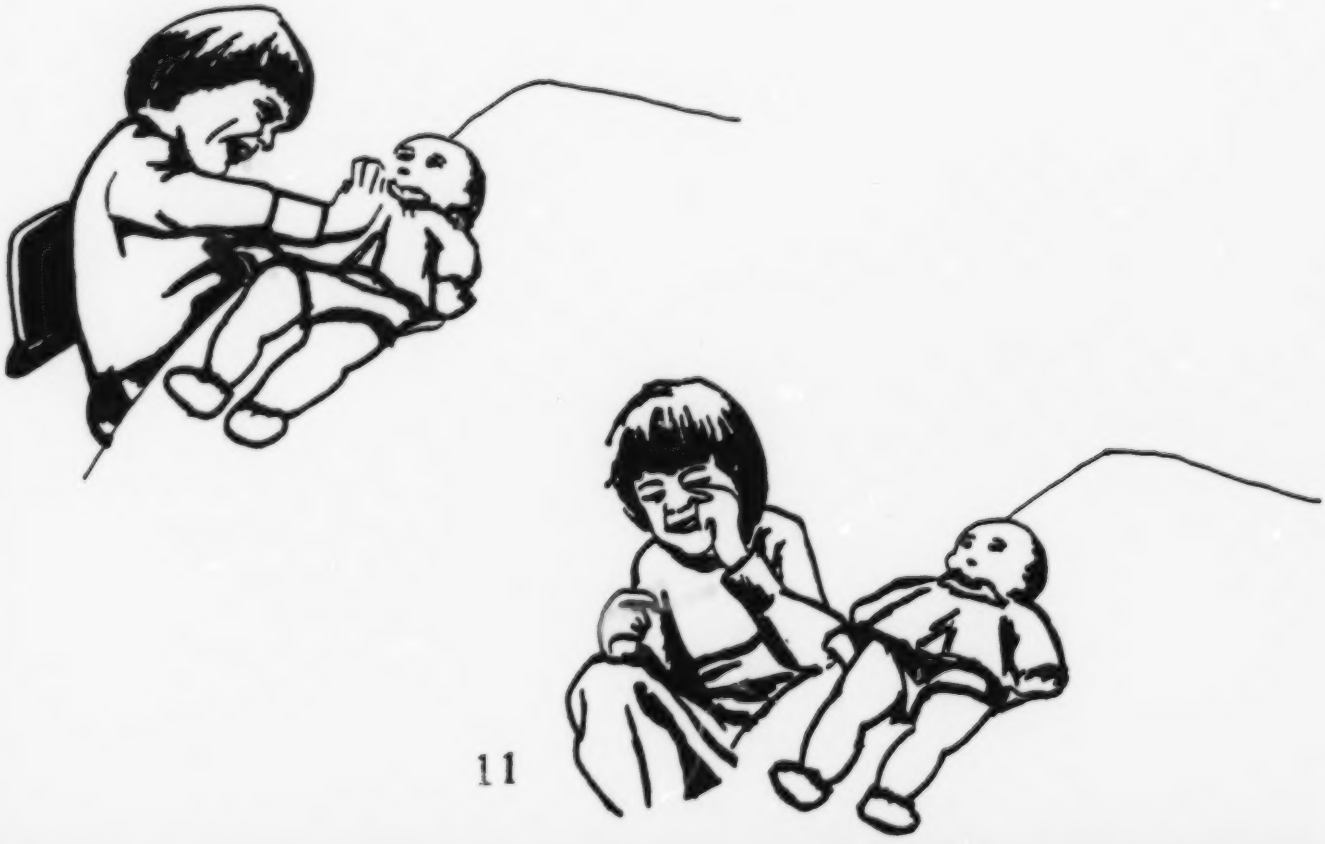
I'd like to introduce you to Christy. She may be coming to your school soon. Maybe you will see her in the lunchroom or in music. Maybe you will visit her class or she will visit your class sometime. This booklet will help you know her a little better and know how you can begin to be her friend.


Judy

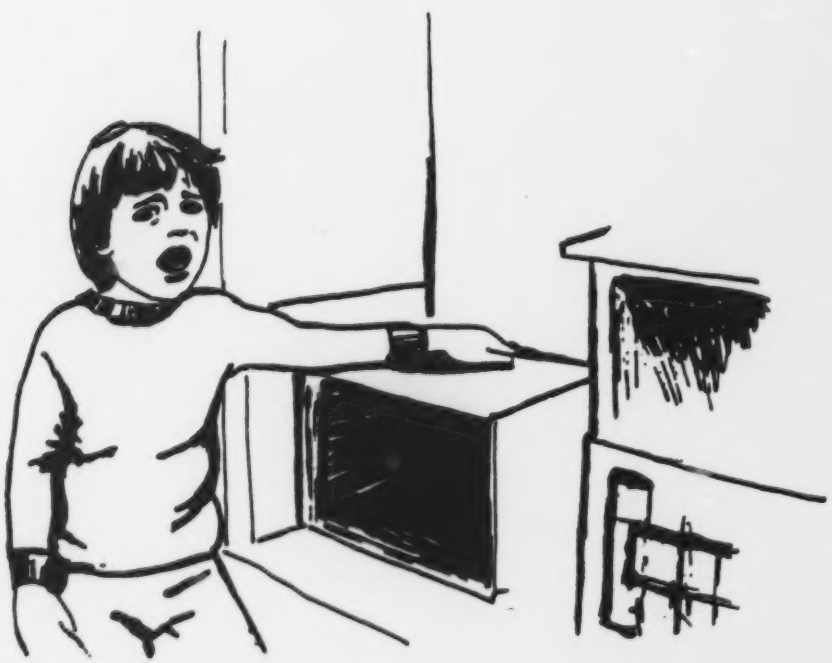
I am Christy. I am 7.
I like to work puzzles, make things
with playdough and do art.

I have just learned to read this year
and I like to print what I read.
I'm doing pretty well in math too.
I've learned my numbers to 100 and
am starting to learn how to add.



Most of the time I'm pretty happy.
(But it isn't always this way).

My world, the way I hear, see, and touch it, is different from yours because I was born with problems that are hard for people to understand. I don't see or hear the world like you do, and sometimes this scares me. When things change, you can ask where your mommy is or what happened to the crayons; but I can't ask or answer questions yet. I am trying to keep my world in order when I want all the chairs pushed in and everything exactly where it was yesterday.



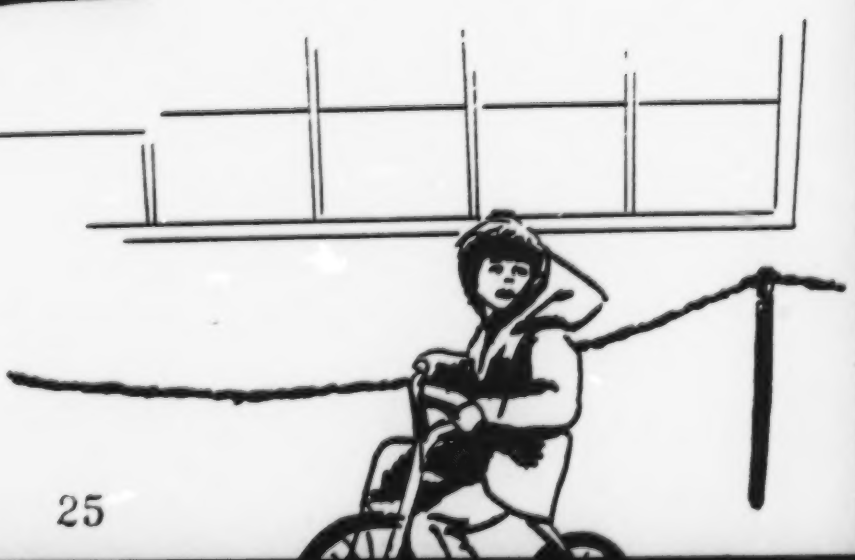
I like to do things at the same time and in the same place everyday. If my speech lesson is changed one day because my class is going to a program in the gym, I am confused. Sometimes I refuse to move. Sometimes I run and hide or cry. If I'm told before things change or if I can help move things, it doesn't upset me as much.

I can't use language as well as you can to explain my wants and feelings. You learned to talk without even thinking how you did it. Learning to understand and use language is very hard for me. I do best when I can copy exactly what you say. When I practice for a long time, I sometimes remember how to say what I want all by myself. Learning to read has helped me to learn to talk.

I can do some of the things you ask me to do, but it takes me a long time to learn what new words mean. If you tell me that I can have a pretzel when I finish my juice, I reach for the pretzel. I do not know what finish or when means so I only heard "can have a pretzel." If you tell me to drink the juice then have a pretzel, I can understand. I need lots of practice doing what words say to learn the meaning.

I used to do things over and over again to entertain myself. I would rock back and forth, spin things, and run on my toes. Now that I have learned to enjoy more activities I don't do those things so much.

I like to carry special toys around with me. This makes me feel safe. I still have bathroom accidents. This seems to upset grown ups alot. Sometimes I forget and sometimes I do it to upset them.



In many ways I am like you. I am growing bigger all the time. I am learning to take care of myself, learning to ride a bike, play, and walk to school by myself.
I like to go to McDonald's. I like to swim; but I don't like to get sick and go to the doctor.

I have a hard time trusting people because I am not sure what they are going to do. It takes me a long time to feel safe with new people. If you grab something from me or try to touch me, I get angry. I might yell or pinch. Sometimes I need to sit all by myself until I feel better.

Someday I would like to play with you. But now I'd rather watch. I used to stay by myself all the time. I can get closer to people now, and sometimes I do art and sing with friends. If people laugh at me or hurt me in other ways I want to run away and hide.

I hope you will help me by trying to understand. The more good experiences I have and the more I learn to trust my world, the better chance I will have to grow up to be useful and happy.

Now you have met Christy. Have you thought of ways you could be her friend? Is there another child in your school or classroom that you could learn to understand better?
Do you have any questions about Christy?